

## **Book:**

### **Connecting Language, Literacy, and Cognitive Development:**

#### **Multidisciplinary Approaches to Education**

**Edited by: Dr. Abdellah Chekayri**

## **Chapter Highlights:**

**Orthographic modernization for education** addresses disparities between traditional Qur'anic orthography and modern conventions, necessitating updates to enhance accessibility and comprehension for children and non-native speakers.

**Balancing tradition with innovation** is crucial to preserve traditional practices while adopting innovative educational approaches that serve diverse learners without compromising the Qur'an's spiritual heritage.

**Orthographic changes aimed at enhancing the translation** of the Qur'an for diverse modern audiences ensure accessibility while maintaining the traditional form.

**Incorporation of modern orthographic elements** into educational materials is designed to improve comprehension and learning outcomes for students studying the Qur'anic text.

**Recognition of the Quran's adaptability to different linguistic contexts** through its inclusive approach to multiple valid readings (qirāʾāt) reflects its capacity to resonate across diverse cultural and linguistic landscapes.

**Emphasis on the critical role of the Uthmanic script** in preserving the sanctity and authenticity of the Qur'anic text, while proposing updates to its orthography that respect its historical and religious significance.

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## From Divine Revelation to Human Inscription: Modernizing the Qur’anic Orthography for Pedagogical and Translation Purposes

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### Abstract

This chapter explores the intricate relationship between the Arabic language (Classical and Modern) and the Qur’anic text by emphasizing how the Qur’anic revelation reinforced and advanced the Arabic script. The chapter also highlights the significant role of the *ṣuṭḥmanic* script in preserving the sacred text and addresses the contemporary challenges in teaching the Qur’an, particularly to children and non-Arabic speakers, arising from the disparities between traditional orthography (in which most Qur’anic texts are written and modern spelling conventions in which Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) is taught. The study strives to review the orthographic practices with the aim of incorporating modern punctuation in the Qur’anic text for better accessibility and comprehension without the detriment to its sanctity. The study further proposes a hybrid system that harmonizes classical Arabic grammar with traditional *tajwīd* rules, alongside the development of interactive educational materials. The rationale behind this approach is to balance the preservation of tradition with the adoption of innovation to meet the evolving educational needs of diverse learners while safeguarding the Qur’an’s message and spiritual heritage.

### Keywords

Arabic language, Qur’an, *ṣuṭḥmanic* script, orthography, *tajwīd*, punctuation, pedagogical challenges, linguistic modernization, Qur’anic education, translation studies.

## 1. Introduction

Perhaps surprisingly, no language in recorded history has likely been as deeply intertwined with the preservation and dissemination of a sacred text as Arabic has been with the Qur’an. The Qur’an, which was revealed and documented in the eloquent language of the Arabs, emphasizes this connection: “*Indeed, We have sent it down as an Arabic Qur’an that you might understand*” (*Ḥinnā ḥanzalnāhu Qur’ānan Ṣarabiyyan laṣallakum taṣqīlūn*<sup>1</sup>, Surah Yusuf,

12:2) (See the Transliteration Guide in Appendix A). Furthermore, it was transmitted through a prophet who spoke Arabic, “the language of his people”, as emphasized in the verse (ʔāya): “And We did not send any messenger except [speaking] in the language of his people” (*wamā ʔarsalnā min rasūlin ʔillā bilisāni qawmihi*, Surah Ibrahim, 14:4). These verses indicate the Qur’an’s vital role in elevating Arabic to an unparalleled status that has shaped it into a medium capable of capturing divine revelation.

Historical accounts suggest that the Qur’an was revealed in the dialect of Quraysh, widely regarded as the most eloquent and articulate among the Arab tribes. Scholars such as Al-Farabi noted the clarity and simplicity of the Qurayshi dialect, attributed to its openness to linguistic influences encountered during trade fairs such as *ʔukāḌ*<sup>1</sup>. Al-Suyuti emphasized that Quraysh’s interaction with diverse tribes enriched their language to an extent that enabled them to craft a dialect of exceptional fluency. However, despite this dominance, the pre-Islamic Arabian linguistic landscape was far from uniform; dialects varied widely across the Arabian Peninsula, as evidenced in the famed *muʔallaqāt*<sup>2</sup> (suspended odes), which celebrated the poetic mastery of various tribes. Curiously, many of these celebrated *muʔallaqāt* poets did not actually belong to Quraysh, thus raising questions about the broader linguistic interplay that shaped Classical Arabic (Blachère, 1952).

The Qur’an’s inclusive approach to linguistic diversity is evident in its acknowledgment of multiple readings (*qirāʔāt*)<sup>3</sup> which refer to canonical variations in pronunciation and grammar, all considered equally valid. This flexibility was crucial as Islam expanded beyond its Arabian origins and encompassed new linguistic communities in its route. As the companions of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ embarked on their dissemination of the Qur’an mission, they encountered a rich tapestry of linguistic diversity in their efforts. Rather than homogenizing these variations, they actively preserved them, thereby contributing to the multifaceted richness of the Qur’anic tradition. This preservation not only underscores the adaptability of the Qur’an to different linguistic contexts but also highlights the companions’ commitment to maintaining the authenticity and depth of its message. As Versteegh (1997) notes, this approach played a pivotal role in shaping the Qur’anic tradition and allows its resonance across diverse cultural and linguistic landscapes. The interplay between unity and diversity within the Qur’anic text

<sup>1</sup> A historical context of marketplaces in pre-Islamic Arabia

<sup>2</sup> The *muʔallaqāt* refers to a celebrated collection of pre-Islamic Arabic odes, traditionally attributed to seven (and sometimes ten) renowned poets. These poems were known for their sophisticated language, themes of honor, love, and tribal pride, and their significant influence on Arabic literature. The name *muʔallaqāt*, meaning “The Suspended,” is believed to reference their legendary status as poems hung on the walls of the Kaaba in Mecca due to their literary excellence, though this claim is more symbolic than historical.

<sup>3</sup> The canonical readings of the Qur’an

thus reflects a profound understanding of language as both a vehicle for divine revelation and a reflection of human expression.

Nevertheless, ancient grammarians and lexicographers frequently accorded precedence to the Qurayshi dialect whilst relegating other regional dialects as anomalous or inferior. This selective focus, as evidenced in the works of scholars like Al-sāmurraʿī (1994), inadvertently obscured the complex interplay among various tribal communities that contributed to the development of a unified linguistic framework. In fact, the emergence of proto-classical Arabic was not the product of a single dialect's dominance but rather the result of a dynamic synthesis of linguistic features drawn from multiple dialects. This harmonization process culminated into a cohesive linguistic standard, which ultimately served as the medium for the revelation of the Qur'an.

This study explores the critical role of linguistic diversity in shaping the Qur'anic text and its implications for Arabic orthography. It examines the historical processes that elevated the Qurayshi dialect, the pedagogical challenges posed by the *ʿuṯmanic* script<sup>4</sup> and the enduring tension between tradition and accessibility. The study proposes a balanced approach to updating orthographic conventions, including the integration of punctuation and hybrid pedagogical tools and seeks to enhance the teaching and translation of the Qur'an for diverse contemporary audiences in a way that ensures its accessibility and safeguards its sanctity.

## 2. General Context of the Arabic Orthography

### 2.1. Writing in Ancient Arabic Dialects

The preservation of the Qur'an began during the Prophet Muhammad's ﷺ lifetime through meticulous oral and written transmission (Ibn al-Jazari, p. 45). Over time, the different Qur'anic readings (*qirāʾāt*) reflected the linguistic richness of the Arabian Peninsula. To ensure the authenticity of these readings, scholars implemented strict criteria, beginning with the caliphate of Abu Bakr al-Siddiq through that of Uthman ibn Affan. This culminated in the standardization of the Qur'an's orthography, known as the *ʿuṯmanic script*, which was established to safeguard the sacred text (Gilliot, 2010, p. 157; Neuwirth, 2010, p. 102).

However, scholarly debates have long persisted regarding the nature of the *ʿuṯmanic* script. Some scholars, such as Al-Suyuti (p. 78), argued that it was divinely ordained and therefore immutable, reflecting a sacred and unalterable form. In contrast others, including Versteegh

<sup>4</sup> The standardized orthographic system implemented during the caliphate of 'Uthman ibn Affan (r.a.) to unify the written Qur'anic text. This system was designed to preserve the integrity of the Qur'an by addressing linguistic variations and ensuring a consistent and authoritative textual representation across the expanding Islamic world (Blachère, 1952).

(1997, p. 115), contended that it was a product of human effort, designed to be adaptable for educational and practical purposes. Historically, the introduction of diacritical marks and vocalization played a crucial role in addressing ambiguities inherent in the traditional Arabic script. These modifications, as noted by Sadeghi and Goudarzi (2012, p. 235), significantly enhanced the Qur'an's accessibility, particularly for non-Arabic speakers, while at the same time maintaining the text's unity and integrity. Ibn al-Jazari (p. 56) further emphasized that such adaptations were essential for meeting the evolving educational needs of a growing and diverse Muslim community.

Prophet Muhammad ﷺ himself placed great importance on the accurate documentation of the Qur'an by advocating for a dual approach that combined oral recitation with written transcription (Ibn al-Nadim, p. 143). Early manuscripts, however, lacked diacritical marks, vocalization, and punctuation which are characteristics that, rather than impeding comprehension, allowed for a rich diversity of readings. This flexibility, as Owens (2016, p. 207) observes, preserved the linguistic variability of the time, reflecting the dynamic interplay between oral and written traditions. Thus, the *Ṣuṭḥmanic* script served as a unifying framework, and its evolution through the addition of orthographic features ensured the balance between preserving the Qur'an's sacred text and adapting it to the practical needs of its readers.

It has been reported that with the Islamic conquests, the companions of the Prophet ﷺ traveled to newly incorporated regions to teach the Qur'an to both Arabic and non-Arabic speakers. Over time, learners, whether Arabs or non-Arabs, began favoring specific readings associated with renowned reciters (Al-Rajihi, 2013). Terms like the "seven readings" emerged, referencing notable reciters from cities such as Mecca, Medina, Damascus, Basra, and Kufa. Eventually, the number of recognized canonical readings reached ten (Ibn al-Jazari, 1997). These readings illustrate the linguistic diversity prevalent in the Arabian Peninsula before Islam. Scholars established three key criteria to validate correct readings (Ibn al-Jazari, p. 67; Al-Rajihi, 2013; Neuwirth, 2010, p. 211):

- Conformity to Arabic linguistic standards, even if partially.
- Consistency with one of the authoritative *Ṣuṭḥmanic* manuscripts.
- Authentication through an unbroken chain of transmission back to the Prophet ﷺ.

The transmission of the Qur'an, whether orally or in writing, played a critical role in preserving its purity and diversity over the centuries (Sadeghi & Goudarzi, 2012, p. 245). The companions' efforts in teaching the Qur'an in newly conquered lands further maintained this



diversity in readings (Ibn Hajar, p. 112). Later scholars laid a robust foundation to ensure that every valid reading aligned with both the Arabic language and the original texts, which helped preserve the Qur'an's enduring unity amidst its linguistic diversity.

Initially, manuscripts lacked diacritical marks, vocalization, or punctuation, a feature that did not hinder the diversity of readings but preserved the linguistic variability of the time (Owens, 2016). In the early Islamic and pre-Islamic periods, Arabic writing was primarily used as a mnemonic aid for memory rather than a medium for verbatim reading. As Ibn Khaldun noted, Arabs relied on oral tradition and retained a natural proficiency in deciphering written texts without relying on diacritical aids (Ibn Khaldun, p. 89).

During the Umayyad period, errors in Qur'anic recitation prompted the formalization of Arabic grammar by Abu al-Aswad al-duʿali, who also introduced diacritical marks to facilitate reading: a mark above the letter denoted the *fatha* (ـَ) [a], a mark below represented the *kasra* (ـِ) [i], and a mark beside the letter indicated the *damma* (ـُ) [u]. For *tanwīn* (nunation), two marks were added. These diacritical marks were written in a color distinct from the main Qur'anic text to avoid confusion (Al-Suyuti, p. 89). To further distinguish visually similar letters, Abu al-Aswad's students added *ʔiʕjām* (diacritical dots). Later, Khalil ibn Ahmad al-Farahidi played a crucial role in refining diacritical marks. He developed modern vowel marks (*fatha*, *kasra*, *damma*) and introduced the *šadda* (denoting gemination) by modifying the shape of the letter *šīn* (ش). He also created the independent symbol for the *hamza* (ء) by adapting the upper part of the letter *ʕayn* (ع), as both sounds share the same point of articulation (Versteegh, 1997, p. 145). With these developments, the Arabic alphabet became a system of 29 phonetic units, making it one of the most precise writing systems of its time.

Lacking diacritical marks, vocalization, and punctuation, the early writing system posed significant challenges to modern readers (Ibn al-Jazari, p. 67). To interpret and comprehend such texts, readers needed a strong command of Arabic, along with memorization and prior familiarity with the content. Without these skills, the average reader would face considerable difficulties, including:

- Absence of diacritical marks to differentiate between nouns and verbs (e.g., *kataba* versus *kutub*).
- Lack of punctuation to delineate sentence beginnings and endings.
- No diacritical dots to distinguish between visually similar letters (e.g. b (ب), t (ت), θ (ث), n (ن) / j (ج), ḥ (ح), x (خ) / d (د), ḍ (ذ) / r (ر), z (ز) / s (س), š (ش) / ṣ (ص), ḍ (ض) / ṭ (ط), Ḍ (ظ) / f (ف), q (ق))

The standardization of the Arabic script can be traced back to the pioneering efforts undertaken during the caliphate of Abd al-Malik ibn Marwan (685–705 CE). Among the most significant reforms was the introduction of visual elements, such as verse separators and grammatical markers, which were integrated into the Qur’anic text to enhance its clarity and accessibility (Sadeghi & Goudarzi, 2012, p. 235). These additions were not merely cosmetic; they played an important role in resolving ambiguities and ensuring a more precise reading of the scripture, particularly for non-Arabic speakers who relied on visual cues to navigate its complexities (Gilliot, p. 162). This period marked a transformative phase in the history of the Qur’an’s documentation and transmission, as the caliphate sought to balance the preservation of the text’s sacred integrity with the practical need to make it comprehensible to a broader audience. As a result, these enhancements laid the groundwork for a more standardized and universally accessible script, thus making the Qur’an both legible and appreciated across linguistic and cultural boundaries.

The preservation of the Qur’an through both oral transmission and written documentation was crucial to maintaining its integrity across generations. The variations in readings and the development of the *ṣuṭḥānīc* script reflect the linguistic diversity of the Arabian Peninsula and points out the companions’ commitment to safeguarding divine revelation (Neuwirth, 2010, p. 211). Although debates persisted regarding the nature and evolution of Qur’anic writing, the imperative to preserve the original script remains widely recognized among scholars (Ibn Hajar, p. 115). These additions painstakingly ensured that the Qur’an linguistic purity and profound meaning were preserved, thus achieving a delicate balance between accessibility and fidelity to its original form. As Versteegh (1997, p. 148) observes, this equilibrium allows the Qur’an, in its rich diversity and unifying essence, to remain both comprehensible and accessible to future generations while honoring its sacred origins.

## 2.2. Characteristics of Short and Long Vowels in Arabic Orthography

The three primary short vowels in the Arabic language facilitate the smooth flow of air without obstruction, enabling seamless transitions between sounds. These vowels are represented by small diacritical marks: the fathā (ـَ) above the letter, the ḍamma (ـُ) to its side, and the kasra (ـِ) beneath it. In contrast, long vowels (madd) are represented by letters: the ḥālif (ا) for elongating the fathā, the wāw (و) for elongating the ḍamma, and the yāʾ (ي) for elongating the kasra. Additionally, wāw and yāʾ can occasionally serve as semi-vowels (ḥurūf ʿilla).

The duration of a short vowel is approximately 0.16 seconds, while a long vowel lasts twice as

long at 0.32 seconds. Arabic phonology does not allow two different short vowels to co-occur within a single syllable. While short vowels rarely appear in Arabic texts, they are essential in fully diacriticized texts, such as children's books, to eliminate ambiguity. The Qur'an, however, is the only text traditionally written with complete diacritical marks from beginning to end.

### 2.2.1. ʔalif maqṣūra (ى) and ʔalif mamdūda (إ) (Long /a/)

In Standard Arabic, extended vocalization at the end of a word is represented by the ʔalif mamdūda (إ), which appears as a vertical stroke. It is used within words, such as qāla (قال), and at the end of words, such as daʿā (دعا). In the case of ʔalif with a small circle above it (ʔalif xinjariyya), as in ʔanā (أنا), it is pronounced as a natural elongation in Qur'anic recitation. However, when the ʔalif is followed by a hamza with a fatha (ـَ) or ḍamma (ـُ), it is elongated six times longer than a short vowel, lasting over 1.5 seconds. For example: qāla ʔinnii ʔanā ʔaxūka (إِنِّي أَنَا أَخُوكَ قَالَ, Surah Yusuf, 12:69).

Conversely, if the ʔalif is followed by a hamza with a kasra (ـِ) or a consonant, it is naturally elongated during waqf (pausing). During continuous recitation, the ʔalif may not be pronounced at all. The ʔalif maqṣūra, shaped like the letter yāʔ without its dots (ي), appears only at the end of words and is distinct from the ʔalif mamdūda.

### 2.2.2. Diacritical Marks in the Qur'an

The Qur'anic text uses six primary markers to represent elongation (madd):

- **Vertical Stroke (ʔalif xinjariyyah):** This is placed above silent letters, as in *māliki* (مَلِكٍ, Surah Al-Fatiha, 1:4). While modern textbooks use the *ʔalif mamdūda*, the Qur'an employs the *ʔalif xinjariyya* to indicate elongation.
- **Tilde (madda):** This symbol (~) is used to indicate elongation beyond the natural length, as in *ṣufāʿāʔa* (سُفْعَاءُ, Surah Al-Aʿraf, 7:53) or *bimā ʔunzila* (بِمَا أُنْزِلَ, Surah Al-Baqara, 2:4).
- **Stopping Rules:** During *waqf* (pausing), elongation is natural, whereas during continuous recitation, the *ʔalif* may be pronounced as a short vowel. For example, *ʔanā xayrun* (أَنَا خَيْرٌ, Surah Al-Aʿraf, 7:11) becomes *ʔanaxayrun* in *waṣl* (continuous recitation).
- **Final Elongation in nūn:** Certain final *nūn* letters are elongated, as in *al-Ḍunūnā* (الذُّنُونَا, Surah Al-Aḥzāb, 33:10), regardless of whether the reading is paused or continuous.
- **Elongation in Stop Marks:** For example, in *salāsila* (سَلْسِلًا, Surah Al-Insān, 76:4), the final *lām* is elongated during pausing. However, in continuous recitation, the *ʔalif* is



pro-

nounced with tanwiin.

- **Moroccan Script Variants:** In Moroccan orthography, the *ʔalif* pierces the initial *lām* in words like *al-ḍalālah* (الضلالة) to indicate elongation.

### 2.2.3. Distinctions in Diacritical Styles

- **Floating *wāw*:** A small floating *wāw* denotes elongation, as in *mā wūriya* (مَا وُورِي), Surah Al-Aʿraf, 7:20). While modern orthography uses a horizontal elongation (*wū*), the Qurʾanic text employs a floating *wāw*, which may add clarity or stylistic differentiation.
- **Floating *yāʔ*:** Similarly, floating *yāʔ* is used in *ʔilāfihim* (إِلَيْهِمْ), Surah Quraysh, 106:2) to denote omitted elongations, which helps in providing additional recitation guidance.

### *sukūn* (Absence of a vowel)

The *sukūn* indicates the absence of a vowel and is represented by a small circle above the letter. In certain Qurʾanic traditions, such as Moroccan script, the *sukūn* is indicated with unique symbols, such as a small *xāʔ* (خ) or a small *hāʔ* (ه). For silent letters, such as in *miʔata* (مِائَة, Surah Al-Baqara, 2:259) or *ʔāmanū* (آمَنُوا, Surah Al-Baqara, 2:9), early scribes used red circles to mark letters that were written but not pronounced. This practice, as documented by Abu ʿAmr al-Dāni, emphasized the intricacies of Qurʾanic orthography.

## 2.3. *hamza* and Its Placement

The *hamza* can appear as a *hamzat al-waṣl* or *hamzat al-qatʿ*.

- ***hamzat al-waṣl*:** Used at the beginning of words, it is indicated by a small symbol resembling a *ṣād* (ص) above the *ʔalif*. It is pronounced only at the start of speech or after a pause and omitted during connected recitation.
- ***hamzat al-qatʿ*:** Always pronounced, it appears as an independent hamza (ء) or on a support, such as *ʔalif* (أ), *wāw* (و), or *yāʔ* (ي). For instance, in *ʔaṣūdu* (أَعُوذُ, Surah Al-Falaq, 113:1), the hamza is independent, while in *ʔidā jāʔa* (إِذَا جَاءَ, Surah An-Nasr, 110:1), it is written on the *ʔalif*.

### 2.3.1. Variations in *hamza* Usage and Floating Diacritics in Arabic Orthography

In Arabic orthography, discrepancies exist between how the hamza is used in school textbooks and in the Qurʾan. In instructional materials, the *hamzat al-qatʿ* (قطع) is consistently written

over the initial *ʔalif*, whereas in the Qur'an, its placement on *ʔalif* does not always align with

modern conventions.

### 2.3.2. *hamza* Placement in the Middle of Words

The placement of the *hamza* in the middle of words varies between the *ʿuṯmanic* script and modern Arabic orthography. The following table summarizes some of these differences:

<i>ʿuṯmanic</i> script Orthography	Modern Arabic Orthography
The hamza is omitted: <i>yāmurkum</i> (يَامُرْكُم) instead of <i>yaʔmurukum</i> (يَأْمُرْكُم).	The <i>hamza</i> is written on an <i>ʔalif</i> (أ): If pronounced with a <i>fathā</i> (أَ), and the preceding letter is open or silent. Example: <i>yaʔmurukum</i> (يَأْمُرْكُم).
The hamza is omitted: <i>mūminīn</i> (مُؤْمِنِينَ) instead of <i>muʔminīn</i> (مُؤْمِنِينَ).	The <i>hamza</i> is written on a <i>wāw</i> (و): If pronounced with a <i>ḍamma</i> (وُ) and the preceding letter is silent, open, or has a <i>ḍamma</i> . Example: <i>muʔminīn</i> (مُؤْمِنِينَ).
The hamza is omitted: <i>bīsmā</i> (بَيْسَمَا) instead of <i>biʔsama</i> (بَيْسَمَا).	The hamza is written on a <i>yāʔ</i> (ي): If pronounced with a <i>kasra</i> (يِ) or the preceding letter has a <i>kasra</i> . Example: <i>biʔsama</i> (بَيْسَمَا).
The hamza is omitted entirely: <i>barātun</i> (براة) instead of <i>barāʔatun</i> (براءة).	The hamza is written on the line (ء): If pronounced with a <i>fathā</i> and preceded by a silent letter or an elongated vowel. Example: <i>barāʔatun</i> (براءة).  The Arabic script does not allow two consecutive <i>ʔalifs</i> (أأ): In such cases, the <i>hamza</i> is written on the line instead of creating consecutive <i>ʔalif</i> marks.

This table illustrates the systematic differences between the *ʿuṯmanic* script and the modern orthographic conventions, which aim to clarify pronunciation and ensure consistency in writing.

### 2.3.3. Phonological Considerations for *hamza* Placement

The placement of the *hamza* follows a hierarchy of vocal pitch:

- The *kasra* is the strongest, so the *hamza* is written on a *yāʾ* (أ).



- The *ḍamma* is second, leading to placement on a *wāw* (و).
- The *fatḥa* is the weakest, so the *hamza* appears on an *ʔalif* (أ).

An exception occurs when a *hamza* with a *fatḥa* is preceded by a silent *wāw*. In such cases, it is written on the line, as in *samawʔal* (سَمَوْعَل).

## 2.4. Floating Diacritical Marks in Qur’anic Orthography

In the Qur’an, floating diacritical marks (*ḥurūf ʿāḍima*) provide additional phonetic guidance:

- **Floating *nūn* [ن]:** In verbs like *nunjī* (نُجِّي), a small floating *nūn* replaces a missing letter in the root form, as in *nunjī al-muʔminīn* (نُجِّي الْمُؤْمِنِينَ, Surah Al-Anbiya, 21:88).
- **Floating *sīn* [س]:** A small *sīn* is used to indicate alternative pronunciations, as in *way-abṣuṭu* (وَيَبْصُطُ, Surah Al-Baqara, 2:245). The *sīn* (س) above the *ṣād* (ص) suggests it should be pronounced as *sīn*, while the *ṣād* beneath indicates the more common pronunciation as *ṣād*.

These floating marks reflect historical flexibility in recitation (*qirāʔāt*) while maintaining the Qur’an’s phonetic integrity.

## 2.5. Modernizing Qur’anic Orthography for Education

The complexity of Qur’anic orthography has prompted debates about modernization:

- **Preserving Tradition:** Scholars emphasize retaining the *ṣuṭḥānī* script to protect the Qur’an’s sanctity.
- **Facilitating Education:** Others advocate for integrating modern orthographic elements in instructional materials to support comprehension.

A balanced approach is needed: preserving the *ṣuṭḥānī* script for sacred texts while adopting modern conventions in pedagogical contexts to enhance accessibility and learning.

### 2.5.1. Implications of Non-Standardized Orthography

The persistence of orthographic variations in Arabic, without significant revision or standardization, reflects the linguistic and cultural realities that shaped the Qur’an before the writing system reached its current form. This reverence for tradition, particularly in religious texts such as the Qur’an, has posed challenges for the evolution of Arabic orthographic rules. Unlike languages such as French or German, which have undergone orthographic reforms, Arabic has developed more slowly due to the sacredness of its texts and its historical significance.

As a result, the Arabic script has remained largely unchanged, even in the face of social and technological transformations. Any attempt to revise or standardize the script is often seen as an infringement on this sacred heritage (Versteegh, 1997, p. 102).

### 2.5.1.1. Presence or Absence of *ʔalif* in Qur’anic Orthography

The Qur’an presents examples of words written with an *ʔalif mamdūda* (elongated *ʔalif*) in one context but with an *ʔalif xinjariyya* (dagger *ʔalif*) in another. The following table illustrates this inconsistency:

Presence of <i>ʔalif</i>	Use of “curved” <i>ʔalif Xinjariyya</i>
<i>al-ʔadbār</i> (الَّذِينَ), Surah Al-Imran, 3:111: “If they fight you, they will turn their backs and will not be helped.”	<i>al-ʔadbār</i> (الَّذِينَ), Surah Al-Fath, 48:22: “If the disbelievers fight you, they will turn their backs, finding neither ally nor helper.”
<i>al-ʔaṣwāt</i> (الْأَصَوَاتِ), Surah Taha, 20:108: “And the voices will be humbled before the Most Merciful.”	<i>al-ʔaṣwāt</i> (الْأَصَوَاتِ), Surah Luqman, 31:19: “Indeed, the most disagreeable of sounds is the voice of donkeys.”
<i>al-ʔamθāl</i> (الْأَمْثَالِ), Surah Al-Isra, 17:48: “See how they make comparisons for you.”	<i>al-ʔamθāl</i> (الْأَمْثَالِ), Surah Al-Furqan, 25:9: “See how they strike for you comparisons.”

The apparent lack of a unified vision for writing the same words in the Qur’anic text raises several questions. Was the emphasis placed entirely on content which means neglecting a unified orthographic approach? Or did the absence of theoretical maturity in Arabic orthography hinder efforts to standardize its writing system?

### 2.5.1.2. Presence or Absence of *lām* in Certain Words

The inconsistent treatment of the definite article in words beginning with *lām* poses another challenge. Observe the following examples:

- In Surah Taha, 20:130: wamin *ʔānāʔi al-layl* (وَمِنْ أَنَاءِ اللَّيْلِ), the word *al-layl* is written with a dropped *lām*.
- However, in Surah Al-Wāqīʕah, 56:23: *kaʔamθālī al-luʔluʔi al-maknūni* (كَأَمْثِلِ اللَّوْلُؤِ), the *lām* is retained.

In modern orthography, the addition of the definite article *al* to both *layl* and *luʔluʔ* would result in:

- *al-layl* (الَّيْل).
- *al-luʔluʔ* (اللُّؤْلُؤ).

The Qur'an's deviation from this standard suggests challenges in consistently applying orthographic rules during its early transcription.

### 2.5.1.3. Writing *hamza* on *ʔalif* or *wāw*

The writing of *hamza* on an *ʔalif* or *wāw* reflects the difficulty of reconciling dialectal variations in Qur'anic orthography. Examples include:

- *jazāʔu* (جَزَأ), Surah At-Tawbah, 9:26, versus *jazāʔu* (جَزُؤًا), Surah Al-Hashr, 59:17.
- *duʕāʔu* (دُعَاء), Surah Ar-Ra'd, 13:14, versus *duʕāʔu* (دُعُؤًا), Surah Ghafir, 40:50.

Such discrepancies suggest that orthographic conventions were finalized only after the Qur'anic text was transcribed, meaning that safeguarding the Qur'an sanctity took precedence over standardization.

### 2.5.1.4. Transforming Vertical *ʔalif* to *ʔalif maqṣūra*

The treatment of defective verbs shows variation in the use of the vertical *ʔalif* versus the *ʔalif maqṣūra*. Examples include:

- *ṭagā* (طَغَا), Surah Al-Haqqah, 69:11, versus *ṭagā* (طَغَى), Surah Taha, 20:12.

The conjugation of defective verbs reveals roots influenced by dialectal variations. A verb with a vertical *ʔalif* typically ends with *wāw* in its present tense (e.g., *daʕā* / *yadʕū*). Conversely, a verb with a *ʔalif maqṣūra* ends in *yāʔ* (e.g., *saʕā* / *yasʕā*).

## 2.5.2. Recommendations for Orthographic Consistency

To address these challenges, scholars propose balancing respect for the Qur'an's historical orthography with modern pedagogical needs:

- **Preserving Tradition:** Retain the *Ṣuṭḥmanic* script in sacred texts to safeguard its cultural and religious legacy.
- **Modernizing Education:** Use standardized orthography in instructional materials to facilitate learning.

Combining tradition with a modernized approach to Arabic orthography can support effective communication and preserve its rich heritage for future generations.

## **2.6. The Evolution of Arabic Writing and the Role of Punctuation**

### **2.6.1. Writing in the Context of Revelation**

During the period of revelation, Arabic orthography lacked standardized rules. The writing system was in its formative stages, and the Qur'anic text faced significant challenges due to the absence of clear orthographic conventions (Versteegh, 2001, p. 148). Initially, the Arabic script consisted only of consonants and was structured around pauses. Over time, the system evolved with the addition of diacritical marks and vowel signs (Ibn Khaldun, p. 79).

Interestingly, skepticism about Arabic writing ability to accurately convey texts persisted among traditional Muslim scholars (Gilliot, p. 153). Between the late 7th and early 9th centuries, writing primarily served as a mnemonic device for content already familiar to the reader, either through intuition or memorization. The transition from an oral to a written language aimed at readers emerged in the 8th century, facilitated by Persian-origin scribes tasked with translation or drafting personal correspondence in written form (Schoeler, 2006, p. 63).

### **2.6.2. Complexities in the *Ṣuṭḥānī* script**

The orthographic features of the *Ṣuṭḥānī* script reflect a complex and rich system developed over centuries to safeguard the Qur'anic text's integrity (Al-Suyuti, p. 95). Elements such as vocal elongation, silent letters, and orthographic variations underscore the emphasis on precision in recording the Qur'an. Despite deviations from modern orthographic standards, these features represent a rigorous tradition aimed at preserving the sacred text's purity and comprehension, even if inconsistencies sometimes arise (Ibn Hajar, p. 115).

The ongoing debate surrounding the *Ṣuṭḥānī* script highlights the tension between adhering to tradition and meeting the demands of contemporary education. Questions arise about how to balance respect for historical conventions with the need to modernize orthography for easier learning and understanding (Neuwirth, 2010, p. 120). This discourse provides an opportunity to evaluate and modernize Arabic orthography, ensuring it reflects contemporary linguistic realities while respecting the sacred nature of the Qur'anic text.

#### **2.6.2.1. The Role of Punctuation**

Punctuation involves the use of symbols, such as commas, periods, and semicolons to provide

clarity and structure to written texts. Proper punctuation aids in clear and effective communication through highlighting pauses and emphasizing key ideas (Truss, 2003, p. 28). When neglected or misused, punctuation can mislead the reader or distort the intended meaning (Woods, 2006, p. 13). For instance, missing or misplaced punctuation can completely alter the interpretation of a sentence, leaving it open to unintended interpretations (Allen, 2002, p. 44).

In Arabic texts, punctuation is crucial for denoting stops and emphasizing specific concepts or ideas. This is especially significant in sensitive texts like the Qur'an, where precision in conveying the message is paramount (Yagi et al., 2024, p. 6). Without punctuation, it becomes challenging for readers to identify the beginning and end of sentences, which are necessary for understanding complete thoughts or ideas. Thus, punctuation guides the reader to the intended meaning of the text (Woods, 2006, p. 23). In fact, punctuation has two primary functions: structuring sentences by breaking them into essential components and connecting or separating words to form coherent phrases or sentences (Allen, 2002, p. 58).

#### **2.6.2.2. Challenges in Arabic Punctuation**

Despite its importance, systematic use of punctuation in Arabic texts has not yet been fully achieved (Alkhatib et al., 2020, p. 51). Many Arab writers rely on the term “sentence” without clear distinctions between sentences and paragraphs, leading to inconsistency (Zaki, 2013, p. 77). This issue often complicates the identification of sentence boundaries in Arabic writing (Sawalha et al., 2019, p. 88).

Effective punctuation requires an understanding of implicit grammatical rules which writers use to produce and interpret language (Fareh et al., 2020, p. 122). Studies have shown that Arabic writers demonstrate distinctive punctuation patterns but often lack consistency (Yagi et al., 2024, p. 11). Additionally, research has revealed significant differences in sentence length between Arabic and English, highlighting the importance of accounting for these linguistic differences in translation (Yagi et al., 2024, p. 12).

#### **2.6.2.3. Toward Unified Guidelines**

In Arabic, the frequent use of long sentences may reflect the dominance of oral culture, where writers struggled to create fluidity in written communication. This has made reading less intuitive and more challenging. Furthermore, the absence of effective punctuation to encode tone and guide readers' attention often hinders comprehension.

The inconsistencies in punctuation practices call for standardized guidelines to ensure clari-



ty and uniformity in Arabic texts, and mastering punctuation is not just a technical skill but an essential tool for effective communication. Therefore, developing consistent punctuation standards is vital for fostering a broader understanding of Arabic texts and enabling accurate translation and interpretation for a global audience.

#### 2.6.2.4. The Absence of Punctuation in Ancient Arabic Texts

Scholars' familiar with early Arabic texts often notes the absence of punctuation in ancient manuscripts. Marks separating sentences or paragraphs were entirely missing. However, the concept of "pauses," referred to as *fawāṣil*, existed in pre-Qur'anic Arabic writing, and these pauses functioned as markers of rhythm and meaning, similar to how rhyme defines the end of a line in poetry or how a *fāṣila*, "pause", marks the end of a verse in the Qur'an (Awad, 2015, p. 119; Hasnawi, 1973, p. 139).

Interestingly, Allah ﷻ chose names for the Qur'an's structural elements that differed from the terms Arabs used for their literature. Instead of calling His book a *dīwān* (a collection of poems), Allah ﷻ named it *Qurʾān*. Similarly, He used the terms *sūrah* instead of "*qasīdah*" (poem), *ʾāya* instead of "*bayt*" (line), and *fāṣilah* instead of "*qāfiya*" (rhyme) (Al-Hufi, 1971, as cited in Awad, 2015, p. 119).

#### 2.6.2.5. Ethical and Functional Role of Punctuation in Qur'anic Recitation

In the context of the Qur'an, dividing the text with markers to ensure proper recitation was both a moral and religious obligation, and this practice prevented ambiguity in meaning. However, punctuation for non-religious texts was not considered until the late 19th century (Awad, 2015, p. 120).

Arabic travelers such as Rifaʿa Rafiʿ al-Tahtāwi (1801–1873) highlighted the simplicity of the French language as a reason for France's literary and scientific advancements. Al-Tahtāwi noted that French texts allowed for easy reading and comprehension without requiring deep knowledge of grammar and rhetoric, a contrast to Arabic (Yared, 1992, p. 113).

#### 2.6.2.6. The Debate on Punctuation in Arabic

Fawaz criticized the absence of punctuation in Arabic, describing it as a limitation, even though she believed Arabic to be richer and more expressive than European languages. She emphasized that the introduction of punctuation was essential for the development of Arabic (Yared, 2015, p. 127). Similarly, Zaki (1995, p. 5) noted that punctuation enabled French read-

ers, regardless of age or education, to read effortlessly. By contrast, Arabic readers at the time needed sufficient grammatical knowledge to identify sentence beginnings and endings. Zaki advocated for adding punctuation to Arabic manuscripts to facilitate their readability, preserve cultural heritage, and make them accessible to future generations (Awad, 2015, p. 127).

Awad (2015, p. 127) compared the recommendations of Fawaz and Zaki and identified key goals for introducing punctuation in Arabic texts:

1. Enabling the Arab world to read both new and old books easily.
2. Facilitating quick reading without the need to mentally parse sentences.
3. Conveying the author's intent and emotions, which are often difficult to express through words alone.

### 2.6.2.7. Sentence Boundaries in Classical Arabic

Debates in medieval times reflect tension between attributing punctuation principles to divine or prophetic authority versus basing them on linguistic and logical considerations (Osman, 2012, p. 91). Scholars of the period often argued that the placement of pauses in the Qur'an was neither a purely human endeavor nor arbitrary. Instead, it depended on their understanding of the intended meaning of the text (Osman, 2012, p. 91).

Abu Bakr Ibn Al-Anbari (d. 940 CE) developed a theory linking punctuation (specifically stops) to Arabic grammar and morphology, proposing that pauses be defined based on grammatical positioning and semantic reasoning. Ibn Al-Anbari categorized pauses into three types:

- **Complete Stop (*waqf tāmm*):** A pause after a fully independent sentence conveying a complete meaning.
- **Sufficient Stop (*waqf kāfi*):** A grammatically correct pause separating two related parts, requiring repetition of the first part for continued reading.
- **Improper Stop (*waqf qabīḥ*):** A pause that interrupts grammatical or semantic coherence. For instance, a reader should not stop between a construct phrase (*ʔiḍāfah*) or separate a noun from its governing verb without mentioning the grammatical cause (Awad, 2012, pp. 92–93).

Ibn Al-Nahhas emphasized that while some pauses are intuitive, others require deep knowledge of Arabic grammar and prophetic practices. He argued that meaning plays a crucial role in determining appropriate stops (Osman, 2012, p. 93).

## 2.7. Challenges and Considerations

The absence of punctuation raises critical questions:

- Can even native Arabic speakers rely solely on meaning to determine pauses?
- How should necessary pauses for breathing, even when meaning is incomplete, be handled during recitation?
- Does the length of a Qur'anic verse necessitate pauses for practical recitation?

These questions underscore the need for linguists and religious scholars to collaborate on developing punctuation systems for Qur'anic texts, akin to modern usage in secular writing. Such efforts could enhance the accessibility and comprehension of the Qur'an without compromising its sacred content. Integrating punctuation into Arabic texts may spark controversy and debates about balancing tradition with modernization. Respecting the sanctity of the Qur'an is unquestionable, but implementing consistent punctuation could improve readability and facilitate learning by ensuring the text's relevance for contemporary and future audiences.

### 2.7.1. Punctuation Marks in the Qur'anic Text

#### 2.7.1.1. The Sentence in the Qur'an

In the Qur'an, a "sentence" is traditionally defined as an *ṣayya* (verse), which literally means "sign" or "miracle." Unlike modern grammatical constructs that are structured around complete nominal or verbal sentences, a verse may consist of a standalone sentence or part of a larger structure.

Each verse is delineated by specific punctuation marks, including a numerical indicator (۞) that signifies its end. These markers, while distinct, serve both stylistic and religious purposes. Unlike conventional punctuation systems that adhere strictly to grammatical rules, verses follow unique rhythmic, stylistic, and aesthetic guidelines, ensuring both their spiritual and linguistic distinctiveness. The definition of verses thus relies on religious, stylistic, and aesthetic standards, rather than purely grammatical conventions.

#### 2.7.1.2. Sentence Length in the Qur'an

The length of Qur'anic verses varies significantly, reflecting the richness and complexity of the text. Some verses consist of just one or two words, such as Surah Ar-Rahman, 55:64:

“مُدَّهَامَّتَانِ” (*mudhāmmatān*: “Dark green [in color]”).

Conversely, other verses span several lines, narrating stories or presenting legal rulings. Unlike modern sentences, which are often constrained by grammatical and logical principles, Qur'anic verses are shaped by their rhythm and rhetorical beauty, resulting in both brief and elaborate compositions. One notable example is Surah Al-Baqarah, 2:282, the longest verse in the Qur'an, which comprises 128 words. This verse discusses financial transactions and agreements with detailed instructions<sup>5</sup>:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا إِذَا تَدَايَنْتُمْ بِدَيْنٍ إِلَى أَجَلٍ مُّسَمًّى فَاكْتُبُوهُ وَلْيَكْتُب بَيْنَكُمْ كَاتِبٌ بِالْعَدْلِ وَلَا يَأْب  
كَاتِبٌ أَنْ يَكْتُبَ كَمَا عَلَّمَهُ اللَّهُ فَلْيَكْتُبْ وَلْيَمْلِكِ الَّذِي عَلَيْهِ الْحَقُّ وَلْيَتَّقِ اللَّهَ رَبَّهُ وَلَا يَبْخَسَ مِنْهُ شَيْئًا  
فَإِنْ كَانَ الَّذِي عَلَيْهِ الْحَقُّ سَفِيهًا أَوْ ضَعِيفًا أَوْ لَا يَسْتَطِيعُ أَنْ يُمِلَّ هُوَ فَلْيُمْلِلْ وَلِيُّهُ بِالْعَدْلِ وَاسْتَشْهِدُوا  
شَهِيدَيْنِ مِنْ رَجَالِكُمْ فَإِنْ لَمْ يَكُونَا رَجُلَيْنِ فَرَجُلٌ وَامْرَأَتَانِ مِمَّن تَرْضَوْنَ مِنَ الشُّهَدَاءِ أَنْ تَضِلَّ إِحْدَاهُمَا  
فَتُذَكَّرَ إِحْدَاهُمَا الْأُخْرَى وَلَا يَأْب الشُّهَدَاءُ إِذَا مَا دُعُوا وَلَا تَسْمَعُوا أَنْ تَكْتُبُوهُ صَغِيرًا أَوْ كَبِيرًا إِلَى أَجَلِهِ  
ذَٰلِكُمْ أَقْسَطُ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ وَأَقْوَمُ لِلشَّهَادَةِ وَأَدْنَىٰ أَلَّا تَرْتَابُوا إِلَّا أَنْ تَكُونَ تِجَارَةً حَاضِرَةً تُدِيرُونَهَا بَيْنَكُمْ  
فَلَيْسَ عَلَيْكُمْ جُنَاحٌ أَلَّا تَكْتُبُوهَا وَأَشْهِدُوا إِذَا تَبَايَعْتُمْ وَلَا يُضَارَّ كَاتِبٌ وَلَا شَهِيدٌ وَإِنْ تَفْعَلُوا فَإِنَّهُ فُسُوقٌ  
بِكُمْ وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَيُعَلِّمُكُمُ اللَّهُ وَاللَّهُ بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ عَلِيمٌ ﴿282﴾

“O you who have believed, when you contract a debt for a specified term, write it down...”  
(*Surah Al-Baqarah*, 2:282, partial).

This lengthy verse not only conveys complex ideas but also integrates multiple interconnected themes into a single rhythmic flow. Such structural variations highlight the Qur'an's unique blend of rhetorical elegance and depth, which transcends conventional grammatical constraints. The Qur'anic structure demonstrates how punctuation and sentence length in the text are deeply tied to its religious, rhythmic, and stylistic nature. This approach underscores the text's divine origin while challenging modern linguistic norms, inviting readers to explore the sacred message with both reverence and attentiveness.

Readers may lose track of the initial context by the time they reach the end of the sentence. In the Qur'an, the varying lengths of verses serve both stylistic and spiritual purposes, creating a rhythm that resonates deeply with listeners and readers. While short verses capture attention and provide clarity, longer verses convey complexity and depth. This balance ensures that the Qur'an remains both accessible and profound, embodying a unique textual harmony.

The length of verses in the Qur'an is not determined solely by grammatical rules or linguistic conventions but also by religious values, rhetorical impact, and rhythmic harmony. This

<sup>5</sup> The figure illustrates the length of the verse to visualize the complexity of the punctuating it with modern punctuation marks. Differences in perception of what a sentence is may result in different meanings of the verse.

unique combination renders the Qur’anic text distinct in structure compared to other texts. The flexibility and diversity in the length of Qur’anic verses are exemplified in two striking examples. In Surah Ar-Rahman (55:64), the verse “مُدْهَامَّتَان” (*mudhāmmatān*: “Dark green [in color]”) consists of a single word, illustrating brevity and simplicity. In contrast, Surah Al-Baqarah (2:282) features the Qur’an’s longest *āya*, containing 128 words. This verse delves into detailed legal instructions for financial transactions, thus demonstrating the Qur’an’s capacity to articulate intricate ideas within a single verse.

The absence of strict rules for sentence length in Arabic, along with the limited scientific studies on average sentence length, highlights the challenges posed by longer sentences. Short sentences facilitate comprehension and allow readers to follow ideas effortlessly, while longer sentences can be overwhelming and, therefore, require multiple readings to fully grasp their meaning. Short verses contribute to a smoother reading rhythm and enable readers to focus more easily on individual ideas which contribute to engagement and retention. Conversely, long sentences, often filled with subordinate clauses, complicate the text’s structure, potentially leading readers to lose track of the initial context by the time they reach the conclusion.

The variation in verse length is both stylistic and spiritual, creating a rhythm that resonates deeply with its audience. While short verses provide clarity and immediate impact, longer verses convey depth and complexity, ensuring the Qur’an’s text remains both accessible and profound. This balance allows the Qur’an to maintain its sacred essence while delivering its message with rhetorical excellence.


### 2.7.2. The Role of Meaning in Qur’anic Sentence Structure

The rhythm of the Arabic language significantly influences how verses are divided in the Qur’an. As a result, Qur’anic punctuation depends not only on sentence structure or grammar but also on the need for pauses that enhance rhetorical impact or allow the reciter to breathe (Barakat, 2016, p. 67). Although a verse may extend into the following verse, Pickthall (1977, p. 15) observes that rhythmic repetition creates a natural pause, often making the section conclude intuitively. Consequently, Qur’anic punctuation contributes to the rhythm and tone of the recitation (Barakat, 2016, p. 68).


Importantly, punctuation marks in the Qur’anic text regulate reading and recitation but do not define grammatical meaning or indicate the beginning or end of a complete sentence (Al Azami, 2019, p. 53). These punctuation marks can be categorized into two main types: points and pauses. Points are often represented by a circular symbol at the end of an *āya*, while pauses



are indicated by different symbols above the line within a verse (Barakat, 2016, p. 69). These symbols guide readers on where they should, could, or must not stop. Interestingly, they do not differentiate between declarative, interrogative, or exclamatory sentences, which justifies the need for modern punctuation in educational contexts.

Adding contemporary punctuation to the Qur’anic text could not only ease recitation but also enhance comprehension (Chekayri & Boulhrir, forthcoming). One significant limitation of traditional Qur’anic punctuation is the symbol , which simultaneously denotes a pause and the end of a verse. While verses are often independent phrases, they may only provide a complete meaning when read alongside preceding or subsequent *ṭāyāt*. Thus, meaning plays a key role in defining sentence boundaries in the Qur’an, although aesthetic and rhythmic elements also influence verse structure to facilitate *tajwīd* (Qur’anic recitation rules).

In some cases, the full meaning of a passage becomes clear only after reading multiple consecutive verses. For instance, the connection between verses 11 and 12 in Surah Al-Kahf (18:11–12) demonstrates this:

	فَضَرَبْنَا عَلَىٰ آذَانِهِمْ فِي الْكَهْفِ سِنِينَ عَدَدًا 11 ثُمَّ بَعَثْنَاهُمْ لِنَعْلَمَ أَيُّ الْجَرْيِينَ أَحْصَىٰ لِمَا لَبِثُوا أَمْدًا 12
---	---

*faḍarabnaa ʿalaa ʔaadaanihim fii lkahfi siniina ʿadadan (11), ʔumma baʿaṡnaahum linaʿla-ma ʔayyu lhizbayni ʔahṡaa limaa labiṡuu ʔamadan (12).*

“So We cast their senses in the cave for a number of years. Then We resurrected them that We might test which of the two parties was most precise in calculating how long they had remained.”<sup>6</sup>

These verses highlight how meaning is distributed across the two verses, necessitating their sequential reading for complete understanding. Here, it could be argued that semantically the two verses constitute one sentence; hence, they should be punctuated as such in a modern text.

### 2.7.3. Punctuation and Qur’anic Translation

A critical issue in Qur’anic translation is the reliance on original punctuation marks. From an educational perspective, this reliance poses significant challenges for interpreting the text’s meanings. Translating the Qur’an often involves subjectivity, as translators’ ideological, cultural, and social backgrounds influence their choices (Gunawan, 2022). Some translations align

<sup>6</sup> Translated by the authors

with moderate Islamic practices, while others reflect more transnational ideologies. These biases can be traced through the translators’ techniques and socio-cultural contexts that affect the reader’s perception of the text.

Modern English translations of the Qur’an from the 20th and 21st centuries often treat verse numbering as sentence-ending punctuation (e.g., periods). However, structural analysis reveals that complete meaning may require multiple *āyāt*. Thus, making a version of the Qur’an with modern punctuation available for academic and educational purposes, alongside contextual explanations in simple, modern English, could significantly enhance understanding.

#### 2.7.4. Analyzing the Impact of Modern Punctuation

The table below illustrates how punctuation variations can alter the meaning of Qur’anic verses:

Example 1
وَإِذْ اعْتَزَلْتُمُوهُمْ، وَمَا يَعْبُدُونَ إِلَّا أَلَلَّ، فَأْوُوا إِلَى الْكَهْفِ. يَنْشُرْ لَكُمْ رَبُّكُمْ مِنْ رَحْمَتِهِ وَيُهَيِّئْ لَكُمْ مِنْ أَمْرِكُمْ مَرْفَقًا (الكهف، 16)
<i>waʔidi ʕtazaltumuuhum, wamaa yaʕbuduuna ʔillaa llaaha, faʔwuu ʔilaa lkahfi. yanʕur lakum Rabbukum min rrahmatihii wayuhayyiʔ lakum min ʔamrikum mirfaqan (16).</i>
“And when you have withdrawn from them, and that which they worship other than Allah, take refuge in the cave. Your Lord will spread out for you His mercy and prepare for you a place of rest.” ( <i>Surah Al-Kahf, 18:16</i> )
Example 2
وَإِذْ اعْتَزَلْتُمُوهُمْ وَمَا يَعْبُدُونَ إِلَّا أَلَلَّ، فَأْوُوا إِلَى الْكَهْفِ. يَنْشُرْ لَكُمْ رَبُّكُمْ مِنْ رَحْمَتِهِ وَيُهَيِّئْ لَكُمْ مِنْ أَمْرِكُمْ مَرْفَقًا (الكهف، 16)
<i>waʔidi ʕtazaltumuuhum wamaa yaʕbuduuna, ʔillaa llaaha, faʔwuu ʔilaa lkahfi. yanʕur lakum Rabbukum min rrahmatihii wayuhayyiʔ lakum min ʔamrikum mirfaqan (16).</i>
“And when you have withdrawn from them and that which they worship other than Allah, take refuge in the cave. Your Lord will spread out for you His mercy, and prepare for you a place of rest.” ( <i>Surah Al-Kahf, 18:16</i> )

Table 1: Variations in meaning due to punctuation changes in the Qur’an.

Treating verse numbers as sentence-ending punctuation can fragment meaning or render it incomplete. The proposed punctuation that incorporates modern markers such as commas, periods, and semicolons help convey the message more coherently. This approach highlights the importance of creating Qur’anic editions with modern punctuation to enhance readability and comprehension, especially in educational and analytical contexts.

## Sentence Structure in Qur'anic Verses vs. Textbooks

Unlike Qur'anic *ḥāyāt*, which often have a poetic rhythm and may lack complete information within a single verse, modern Arabic sentences in textbooks follow the grammatical rules of Modern Standard Arabic (MSA). These sentences typically feature clear structures with a subject and predicate or a verb, subject, and object. They also employ modern punctuation, such as periods, commas, and question marks, to indicate sentence boundaries and ensure logical coherence. In contrast, Qur'anic symbols prioritize facilitating *tajwīd* and guiding recitation rather than defining grammatical sentences in the modern sense.

Despite the Qur'an's evolution in terms of diacritical marks and vocalization to align with modern Arabic, its sacred and poetic structure remains distinct. Introducing modern punctuation into Qur'anic text could help Arabic learners avoid the challenge of mastering two orthographic systems simultaneously. This adjustment would allow learners to focus more on the text's content during critical stages of education.

### 2.7.5. Translating the Qur'anic Text and Punctuation

The translation of the Qur'an dates back to the Prophet Muhammad's ﷺ time. One early example is the letter he sent to Heraclius, the Byzantine Emperor, which was translated into Greek (Ibrahim, 1988). Throughout history, some scholars opposed translating the Qur'an, arguing that its meanings could not be accurately conveyed in other languages. They feared that translations might replace the original text and lead to divisions among Muslims (El Fadl, 2001). Others categorized translations into three types: equivalent literal, non-equivalent literal, and interpretative. Only the latter was accepted if it was based on *Sunnah* and Qur'anic exegesis (*tafsīr*) (Abdel Haleem, 2010).

The Qur'an has been translated into many languages, with approximately 120 translations in 35 languages globally (Kidwai, 2017). These translations reflect diverse religious, ideological, and sectarian backgrounds, underscoring the need for review to ensure accuracy and prevent misinterpretations or distortions (Esack, 1997). Errors in translation can misrepresent the essence of Islam, particularly to those unfamiliar with its authentic teachings (Saeed, 2006).

One significant issue with many textual translations of the Qur'an is their direct reliance on the punctuation marks found in the original text. This practice can be problematic for educational purposes because it makes it difficult to use such translations to explain the meanings of certain verses (El Shamsy, 2013). When each verse is treated as a complete sentence, it is isolated

from its grammatical and semantic context, impacting overall comprehension.

Another rarely discussed aspect is the subjectivity and ideological influence in translating the Qur'an. Some translations adhere to moderate principles, while others adopt transnational Islamic ideologies (Nasr, 2002). Strategies for translation often reflect the translators' religious, cultural, and political backgrounds, affecting the process and outcomes (Venuti, 2018). This phenomenon underscores the impact of the socio-cultural and political contexts of translators and their intended audiences on the methods and techniques used to convey the Qur'anic message from source to target language.

### 2.7.6. The Challenge of Translation Approaches

Translation techniques are shaped by three levels of understanding:

- 1. Morphological and Syntactical Level:** Addressing grammatical and lexical aspects of the text.
- 2. Semantic Equivalence:** Focusing on sentence content and conceptual and subjective elements.
- 3. Pragmatic Level:** Highlighting communicative functions and linguistic effects (Baker, 1992).

A standardized Qur'anic text with modern punctuation could significantly aid contemporary translators and educators (Farid, 2020). Providing an equivalent text in the target language remains a persistent challenge due to morphological, syntactical, and lexical differences between languages. These differences impose constraints on the translation process and significantly impact the translator's ability to achieve semantic equivalence, a critical element in translating the Qur'an (Newmark, 1988).

Many translation researchers have overlooked the fact that target languages often use punctuation to convey meaning, whereas source languages might not or follow different punctuation rules (Pellat, 2013). These differences complicate translation efforts, as seen with the Qur'anic text, which does not follow modern punctuation conventions. Addressing these disparities is essential to ensure that the translated text remains faithful to the original (Ghazala, 2002). This highlights the need for standardized punctuation to close gaps and improve translation accuracy and consistency (Hatim & Mason, 1997).

Standardizing punctuation would provide clear guidelines for pauses, intonations, and sentence structures without altering the text's meaning, making it more accessible and compre-

hensible to readers (Gonzalez, 2004). It would also help define the average sentence length in the Qur'an, reducing inconsistencies and errors stemming from subjective punctuation practices in current translations. A standardized text with universally accepted punctuation would simplify the process of teaching the Qur'an to children and new converts, ensuring a coherent understanding (Hallaq, 2005). Achieving this requires collaboration among linguists, educators, and Islamic scholars to ensure that standardized punctuation respects linguistic and religious sensitivities while improving readability and pedagogical utility (Abdel Haleem, 2005).

To illustrate how modern punctuation can be applied to the Qur'anic text to support comprehension and translation, three of the most common English translations of the Qur'an were analyzed. These translations were examined to understand how they addressed the concept of verse versus sentence structure and how these impacts meaning. Following the analysis, a re-punctuated and contextually translated version of the Qur'anic text was proposed by the authors of this work.

Original Arabic Qur'anic text<sup>7</sup> :

أَمْ حَسِبْتَ أَنَّ أَصْحَابَ الْكَهْفِ وَالرَّقِيمِ كَانُوا مِنْ آيَاتِنَا عَجَبًا (9)

إِذْ أَوَى الْفِتْيَةُ إِلَى الْكَهْفِ فَقَالُوا رَبَّنَا آتِنَا مِنْ لَدُنْكَ رَحْمَةً وَهَيِّئْ لَنَا مِنْ أَمْرِنَا رَشَدًا (10)

فَضَرَبْنَا عَلَى أَدَانِهِمْ فِي الْكَهْفِ سِنِينَ عَدَدًا (11) ثُمَّ بَعَثْنَاهُمْ لِنَعْلَمَ أَيُّ الْحِزْبَيْنِ أَحْصَى لِمَا لَبِثُوا أَمَدًا (12)

*ʔam ʔasibta ʔanna ʔaṣṣāba lkahfi warraqīmi kānū min ʔāyātina ʔajabā (9)*

*ʔid ʔawā lfitiyatu ʔilā lkahfi faqālū rabbanā ʔātinā min ladunka raḥmatan wahayyiʔ lanā min ʔamrinā raṣadā (10)*

*faḍarabnā ʔalā ʔadhānihim fī lkahfi sinīna ʔadadā (11)*

*ṯumma baṣaṯnāhum linaʔlama ʔayyu lḥizbayni ʔaḥṣā lima labiṯū ʔamadā (12).*

“Or deemest thou that the People of the Cave and the Inscription are a wonder among Our portents? When the young men fled for refuge to the Cave and said: Our Lord! Give us mercy from Thy presence, and shape for us right conduct in our plight. Then We sealed up their hearing in the Cave for a number of years. And afterward We raised them up that We might know which of the two parties would best calculate the time that they had tarried.”<sup>8</sup> (Pickthal)

<sup>7</sup> The Qur'an. Surah Alkahf. 18:9-12 <https://englishquran.com/>

<sup>8</sup> Pickthal's translation of Surah Alkahf. 18:9-12. <https://englishquran.com/>



“Or dost thou reflect that the Companions of the Cave and of the Inscription were wonders among Our Sign? Behold, the youths betook themselves to the Cave: they said, “Our Lord! bestow on us Mercy from Thyself, and dispose of our affair for us in the right way! Then We draw (a veil) over their ears, for a number of years, in the Cave, (so that they heard not): Then We roused them, in order to test which of the two parties was best at calculating the term of years they had tarried!”<sup>9</sup> (Abdullah Yousuf)

“Do you think the men of the cave and Ar-Raqim were so strange among Our signs? When those young men took shelter in the cave, and prayed: “O Lord, grant us Your favour and dispose our affair aright,” We sealed off their ears in the cave for a number of years, then roused them to ascertain which of the two groups could account for the period they had stayed.”<sup>10</sup> (Ali)

Have you [the messenger] thought that the people of the cave and Arraqeem were amazed by our signs (9) when the young men took refuge in the cave and said Our Lord bless us with your mercy and pave our way with guidance (10) so We cast their senses in the cave for many years (11) then We brought them back to show which of the two parties reckoned how long they remained (12).<sup>11</sup> (Chekayri and Boulhrir)

The translations of verses 9–12 of Surat Al-Kahf by Pickthall, Yusuf Ali, and Ali illustrate the distinct stylistic preferences, syntactic patterns, and punctuation methods each translator employs to render the Qur’anic message in English. Pickthall’s approach is notably archaic and formal in a way that is characterized by drawing upon a style reminiscent of historic religious texts such as the King James Bible. His formal tone is evident in expressions like “Or deemest thou” and “Our Lord! Give us mercy from Thy presence.” His syntax features a mix of dependent and independent clauses, often leading to complex sentence structures. For example, the clause “When the young men fled for refuge to the Cave and said: Our Lord!” introduces the dependent idea, which then transitions to the independent clause, “Give us mercy from Thy presence, and shape for us right conduct in our plight.” Pickthall employs minimal punctuation, using colons for direct speech and semicolons for related clauses. While this creates a flowing and uninterrupted text, it may challenge modern readers unfamiliar with the archaic style.

<sup>9</sup> Abdullah Yousuf’s translation of Surah Alkahf. 18:9-12. <https://englishquran.com/>

<sup>10</sup> Yusuf Ali’s translation of Surah Alkahf. 18:9-12. <https://englishquran.com/>

<sup>11</sup> The Authors’ translation of Surah Alkahf. 18:9-12 without punctuation.

In contrast, Yusuf Ali adopts a translation that retains a formal tone but is more accessible. Phrases like “dost thou reflect” still evoke an older style, but his overall sentence structures are clearer and easier to follow. He balances dependent and independent clauses effectively, as seen in, “Behold, the youths betook themselves to the Cave: they said, ‘Our Lord! Bestow on us Mercy from Thyself and dispose of our affair for us in the right way!’” Yusuf Ali’s inclusion of explanatory parentheses, such as “(so that they heard not),” clarifies meanings and adds context. Additionally, his use of exclamation marks injects energy and urgency into the text, creating a dynamic and expressive rendition.

Ali’s translation, being the most modern of the three, is characterized by its simplicity and directness. He opts for contemporary phrases like “Do you think” and “grant us Your favor,” aligning more closely with current English usage. Ali’s syntax relies primarily on independent clauses, resulting in straightforward sentences such as, “When those young men took shelter in the cave, and prayed: ‘O Lord, grant us a favor from Yourself and dispose our affair aright.’” This is followed by another clear clause, “We sealed off their ears in the cave for a number of years.” Ali also adopts modern punctuation practices, using commas to separate clauses and quotation marks to delineate speech, which enhances clarity and accessibility for readers.

The differences in syntax and punctuation across these translations significantly affect their readability and tone. Pickthall’s minimalist punctuation can obscure meaning for contemporary audiences, whereas Yusuf Ali’s detailed annotations and expressive punctuation offer clarity and depth. Yusuf Ali’s straightforward modern style strikes a balance between simplicity and accessibility, though it occasionally sacrifices richness in tone.

These differences indicate the necessity of standardizing punctuation in the Qur’anic text to ensure consistency and clarity in translations and educational materials. Pickthall’s minimalist approach of may hinder comprehension, while Yusuf Ali’s detailed style modern simplicity offer varying degrees of clarity. A collaborative effort among linguists, educators, and Islamic scholars specializing in Qur’anic studies is essential to develop a standardized system. Such a system would aim to preserve the syntactic and contextual integrity of the Qur’an while facilitating accurate, consistent translations and educational interpretations for diverse and global audiences.

For example, a proposed translation of verses 9–12 offers a clear, modern style:

Have you [the messenger] thought that the people of the cave and Ar-Raqeem were amazed by Our signs (9)? When the young men took refuge in the cave and said: “Our Lord, bless

us with Your mercy and pave our way with guidance (10).” So, We cast their senses in the cave for many years (11), then We brought them back to know which of the two parties best calculated how long they had remained (12).

This version avoids the archaic tone of Pickthall and Yusuf Ali while maintaining more contextual detail than Ali. The inclusion of insertions like “[the messenger]” clarifies the subject for readers, offering context absent in other translations. The straightforward syntax mirrors Ali’s modern approach but provides greater precision and clarity. Modern punctuation, including commas, quotation marks, and verse numbering, enhances the text’s readability. By aligning with a standardized punctuation model, this translation minimizes subjective interpretations of the Qur’an and supports better understanding for both general and educational purposes.

## 2.8. Challenges in Teaching the Qur’anic Text to Children

This paper argues that teaching the Qur’anic text to children—many of whom are either beginners in Standard Arabic or learning it as a second language—faces significant pedagogical challenges from a literacy perspective. One central issue is the current punctuation system used in the Qur’an, which does not lend itself to accurate translations of meaning. This is largely because translators lack a standardized system for interpreting meaning beyond the lens of specific religious ideologies. Research exploring the discrepancies between the punctuation systems of Standard Arabic and Qur’anic Arabic within formal pedagogy and translation is minimal, if not entirely absent. This work seeks to address this gap and calls for future investigations into the challenges of teaching Qur’anic literacy. By focusing on children and beginner learners, this study underscores the difficulties that arise when navigating two distinct punctuation systems within what is ostensibly the same language. Addressing the punctuation of the Qur’anic text for both pedagogical and translational purposes could not only enhance comprehension for learners but also aid translators in accurately interpreting verses within their syntactic and semantic contexts.

One major challenge in teaching the Qur’anic text is the lack of empirical research examining the impact of introducing distinct orthographic and punctuation systems at different stages of learning Modern Standard Arabic (MSA). The divergence in rules between *tajwīd* (Qur’anic recitation) and MSA can confuse young learners, as they must adapt to a completely new set of mechanics and orthographic conventions after learning the basics of literacy. This abrupt transition can hinder their progress and lead to frustration. To address this, educators need evidence-based tools for effectively teaching both MSA and Classical Arabic (CA), especially the

version used in the Qur'an.

Another significant obstacle is the linguistic and pedagogical complexity of Qur'anic Arabic. The register of CA differs markedly from MSA, with punctuation used primarily for phonetic purposes rather than for conveying meaning. Additionally, diachronic variations in script can make it even more difficult for children to grasp the rules of Qur'anic Arabic. For young learners still developing their literacy skills, mastering this additional set of conventions can feel overwhelming. This necessitates innovative teaching methods that bridge the gap between MSA and CA and, thus, enable a smoother learning experience.

The Qur'an's intricate sentence structures and rich rhetorical devices present further challenges. Metaphors, allegories, and poetic language, which are abundant in the Qur'anic text, require advanced cognitive and linguistic abilities that young learners typically have not yet developed. Teachers face the daunting task of simplifying these sophisticated elements without compromising the text's integrity. To address this, new methodologies must be devised to make the content more accessible while preserving its depth and meaning.

Maintaining children's interest and motivation while they learn the Qur'an alongside basic Arabic language skills is another hurdle. The abstract nature of the Qur'anic text and its perceived distance from young learners' everyday experiences can lead to disinterest or even aversion. To counter this, educators must adopt interactive, blended pedagogies that engage children effectively. Techniques such as storytelling, using visual aids, and incorporating activities that make learning both entertaining and enlightening are essential. By relating the lessons of the Qur'an to the lived experiences of young learners, teachers can foster a deeper connection with the text, which will help reduce the risk of disinterest or abandonment in later years.

In summary, teaching the Qur'anic text to children involves addressing a range of linguistic, cognitive, and motivational challenges. Bridging the gap between MSA and CA, simplifying complex rhetorical elements, and employing engaging, child-centered pedagogies are all crucial to ensuring that young learners not only understand the Qur'anic text but also appreciate its significance and beauty. These strategies can pave the way for a more effective and meaningful learning experience.

### 3. Conclusion

The exploration of the evolution of Qur'anic script and Arabic orthography reveals the intricate relationship between language and sacred texts. The connection between the Arabic

language and the Qur'an has played a pivotal role in preserving and enriching the language. However, it has also presented significant challenges to the modernization and standardization of orthographic rules. The *Ṣuṭḥmanic script*, characterized by its precision and linguistic richness, reflects the linguistic diversity and dialectal variations that influenced the recording of the text. While this has imbued it with a unique character, it has also introduced discrepancies that require careful consideration.

Preserving the sanctity of the Qur'anic text necessitates adherence to established traditions, such as the *Ṣuṭḥmanic script*, to ensure the authenticity and continuity of the text. However, the educational challenges faced by the younger generation, particularly early learners, underscore the need to reconsider updating the orthographic system and introducing punctuation. Such updates could simplify Qur'anic texts and make them more accessible without compromising their spiritual significance.

The development of a hybrid punctuation system that integrates the principles of classical Arabic and traditional rules of Qur'anic recitation could serve as a valuable tool. This system could be instrumental in designing interactive, learner-friendly educational materials that enhance comprehension and ease the learning process. Additionally, involving linguists, educators, and psychologists in this initiative would ensure that the religious and cultural sensitivities of Qur'anic texts are preserved, fostering broader acceptance of the new system.

This study is aimed to urge an academic conversation among scholars about updating the punctuation system in the Qur'an to support the teaching and learning of the Quran by young children and non-Arabic speakers who often need translated versions for better comprehension. It highlights the importance of achieving a balance between respecting traditions and embracing innovation to address the challenges associated with teaching Qur'anic texts. Such an approach could make the Qur'an more accessible to new learners while improving the accuracy of translations and ensuring the effective transmission of its message to future generations. Harmonizing authenticity with modernity remains an essential endeavor to sustain the Arabic language and enable a contemporary understanding of sacred texts in alignment with the demands of the modern era.

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## Appendix

### 1. Arabic Alphabet Transliteration Table with Qur’anic Examples

Arabic Letter	Transliteration	Qur’anic Example	Transliteration
ا	<i>a</i>	أَصْحَاب	<i>ṣaḥāba</i>
ب	<i>b</i>	بِالْكَهْفِ	<i>bilkaḥf</i>
ت	<i>t</i>	تَوَاضَعُوا	<i>tawāṣaw</i>
ث	<i>ṯ</i>	ثُمَّ	<i>ṯumma</i>
ج	<i>j</i>	جَعَلْنَا	<i>jaʿalnā</i>

ح	<i>ḥ</i>	رَحْمَةً	<i>raḥmatan</i>
خ	<i>x</i>	خَيْرَانِ	<i>xayran</i>
د	<i>d</i>	دَعَوَاهُمْ	<i>daʿwāhum</i>
ذ	<i>ḏ</i>	أَذَانِهِمْ	<i>ʾaḏḏānīhim</i>
ر	<i>r</i>	رَشَادًا	<i>rašadan</i>
ز	<i>z</i>	زُرْقَانِ	<i>zurqan</i>
س	<i>s</i>	السَّاعَةِ	<i>ssāʿati</i>
ش	<i>š</i>	شَايْزِينَ	<i>šayʾin</i>
ص	<i>ṣ</i>	صَبْرَانِ	<i>ṣabran</i>
ض	<i>ḏ</i>	ضَرْبَانِ	<i>ḏarabnā</i>
ط	<i>ṭ</i>	طَعَامِكُمْ	<i>ṭaʿāmikum</i>
ظ	<i>ḏ</i>	ظُلُمَاتٍ	<i>ḏulumātin</i>
ع	<i>ʿ</i>	عَالٍ	<i>ʿalā</i>
غ	<i>g</i>	غَفُورٍ	<i>gafūrun</i>
ف	<i>f</i>	فِي	<i>fī</i>
ق	<i>q</i>	قُلْنَا	<i>qulnā</i>
ك	<i>k</i>	كَهْفِهِمْ	<i>kahfīhim</i>
ل	<i>l</i>	لَبِثُوا	<i>labiṭhū</i>
م	<i>m</i>	مَرْحَمَةٍ	<i>marḥamatin</i>
ن	<i>n</i>	نَبْلُوهُمْ	<i>nabluwāhum</i>
هـ	<i>h</i>	هُدًى	<i>hudan</i>
و	<i>w</i>	وَالِيَّيْنِ	<i>waliyyin</i>

## 2. Long Vowels and Diacritical Marks

Arabic	Transliteration	Qur'anic Example	Transliteration
ا (long "a")	<i>ā</i>	كَهْفِهِمْ	<i>qālū</i>
و (long "u")	<i>ū</i>	لَبِثُوا	<i>labiṭhū</i>
ي (long "i")	<i>ī</i>	عَالٍ	<i>ʿalā</i>
šadda ( ّ )	Double the letter	رَبَّنَا	<i>rabbanā</i>
Tanween ( ً, ٌ, ٍ )	<i>-an, -un, -in</i>	رَشَادًا	<i>rašadā</i>

## 3. Special Characters

Character	Transliteration	Qur'anic Example	Transliteration
ع	<i>ʿ</i>	عَالٍ	<i>ʿalā</i>
ء	<i>ʾ</i>	أُمِّ	<i>ʾam</i>

#### 4. Proper Nouns and Titles

Arabic Name/Title	Transliteration	Translation
أَصْحَابُ الْكَهْفِ	<i>ṣaḥāba lkahfi</i>	Companions of the Cave
الرَّقِيمِ	<i>arraqīmi</i>	Al-Raqeem
رَحْمَةً	<i>rahmatan</i>	Mercy